

WINNER

Sharing Ideas, Best Practices

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Every job, career, and profession in the world is taught to employees by doctrine, regulation, and policy. In most cases though, this “by the book” teaching is a blanket method of getting employees familiar with the basics and the foundation of what they need to know. Most of the practical knowledge, and what we may consider useful is actually taught on the job. On the job training is where you will actually see and experience the benefits of individual ideas and procedures come to fruition as each employee and position are individual and unique to the workforce by many factors, such as personality, location, demographics, market and many others. On the job training is nothing more than others sharing with you their knowledge, experience, ideas and procedures.

But what benefits does this provide?

Time management is one benefit of sharing innovative ideas. When one takes over a position and begins to think about how to excel, they usually go through a rigorous process of trial and error to find out what works and what doesn't work. This process can be very time consuming and non-productive until they find their way. But if someone happens to pull them aside and share some inside intelligence on what they should be doing, it may help put them on the fast track to doing well without wasting time through trial and error.

One example of this may be mail outs. A new recruiter comes in and says he/she wants to send a mail out to every high school senior in all of their schools. The experienced recruiter who has been there more than a couple years advises that they have never had more than a one percent response rate on mail outs in their area. This may save the new recruiter a couple hours or more of time wasted preparing these mail outs.

Individual and unit readiness is another benefit. The following example is best explained by relating it to Plato's allegory of the cave. Some people just may not be capable of thinking outside of the box. They may need someone else to suggest different techniques to them that they may not have thought of themselves. This may apply to physical training. If an individual has difficulty running and passing the two mile test, it may take a third party to observe and suggest a different breathing technique or posture or the way they swing their arms. It may be something simple that the runner has never thought of, or wouldn't have without third party insight. But just by the sharing of different techniques they may have assisted with that Soldier being able to pass the physical fitness test and improving the readiness of the Soldier, the unit, and the Army.

Motivation and morale of Soldiers/employees may be a couple more benefits. As a leader you always want to keep your personnel motivated to accomplish the mission or task at hand while at the same time keeping the level of morale up. At times though, it seems that we need to switch things up and try new things to make this continue to happen.

Many times you may find yourself turning to peers or others in leadership roles to gather new unique ideas that may have worked for them, some you haven't tried or used.

These are only a few small examples of the benefits gained from sharing ideas and TTPs, but these just happened to be near the top of my list of what is most important to USAREC and the Army.

The Army is already fully aware of this fact, though. The Battle Command Knowledge System (BCKS) was created for just this purpose. Any Soldier in the Army can benefit immensely by logging on to BCKS and finding ideas and TTPs about the Army in general, or more specifically, for their own MOS. One of the knowledge networks within the BCKS is Recruiting ProNet.

USAREC Soldiers may find many innovative ideas specific to recruiting. But aside from my views on the benefits of information sharing, on the larger scale there are many more benefits such as reducing the time needed to resolve problems, significantly shortening the learning curve, decreasing negative outcomes, and reducing the cost of mission accomplishment.



Entire Organization Benefits from Exchanging TTPs

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In both USAREC and the Army, it is important to constantly look for better ways to do things. When the organizational leadership allows sharing of good ideas and practices it leads to greater efficiency and productivity. Allowing innovation also makes the job Soldiers are doing more interesting because they are thinking about what they are doing and coming up with better ways to accomplish the mission by applying those ideas. When Soldiers feel there is an incentive and are able to share their ideas and best practices, it builds camaraderie amongst fellow peers and raises unit morale.

When organizational leadership demonstrates they have faith in their Soldiers to think outside of the box it allows them to be creative and keep exploring new ways to carry out the same task. This mentality will allow the idea of achieving excellence seem possible. When these ideas are adapted and shared within the organization, it facilitates a strong sense of teamwork. Allowing innovation and adapting best practices focuses on what the Soldiers are doing right and making things better for the organization instead of focusing on the failures and setting standards based on those failures.

Bottom-up approaches encourage more learning within the organization than top-down approaches. The Army is always changing how we conduct missions in combat because the environment is always changing. USAREC is no different. The recruiting markets can be different across the country due to political and economic changes. Some areas are more patriotic than others; therefore it is beneficial to the Army to allow Soldiers to “experiment” and find new approaches to accomplish the mission.

Best practices can vary over time, as new evidence and new possibilities emerge, and from place to place, depending on available resources and infrastructure. What worked for the current leaders years ago may not work today. Identifying an organization's best practices helps Soldiers learn from each other and reuse proven practices. Effective sharing of best practices can help the organization save time and resources and helps avoid reinventing the wheel.

Sharing TTPs is a huge strength to the Army because we share our successes and failures as a group. After completing tasks, we

spend the time through After Action Reviews discussing what went right and wrong but also most importantly, what can be done better? Units that are successful and don't share their ideas make the organization above them run less efficiently. It is easy to maximize on our own accomplishments and rewards and keep information to ourselves.

By not sharing good ideas and considering only the needs of your own unit rather than the organization as a whole, can be the determining factor of the success or failure of the mission. Identifying and sharing best practices helps build relationships and common perspectives among people who don't work side by side. Best practices can also spark innovative ideas and generate suggestions for improving processes, even if a practice can't be used in its entirety. It is one way for you to share your successes and struggles with others so that we can all partner together to find solutions. Where one unit may be struggling, another one may have it all figured out. By highlighting or showcasing Soldiers' work, the whole organization gets some recognition for their work.

As leaders, it is imperative to foster a climate that values learning, encourages collaboration and supports knowledge sharing. We should never be satisfied with a “best practice” being the best, but find a way to expand on it to make it even better. What is “best” also depends on how Soldiers feel about it. If the task is made harder or takes longer, the Soldiers will find a way to work around it. Leaders need to encourage their subordinates to identify the problem and provide a solution to share with higher echelons. We must be mindful of the factors that can impede knowledge sharing within an organization. These include: lack of partnership or trust, lack of desire to seek advice from others or uncover new ways of doing things.

Allowing Soldiers time to innovate and work on projects not directly assigned to them by their leaders is an effective way to motivate them to come up with new ideas. It can be difficult to drive them out of their comfort zones. However, we must express the importance of how useful sharing ideas can be for the organization. If everyone just accepts what is being taught and never finds a way to make it better, innovation is dead and no one will benefit from it.

